

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000550

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, EUR/ACE, EUR/PGI

DEPT PLEASE PASS USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KHIV](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ANOTHER LOOK AT HIV/AIDS IN ARMENIA

SENSITIVE

REFTEL: YEREVAN 522

1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Please treat accordingly.

SUMMARY

2. (SBU) Summary: Armenia's proximity to countries hit hard by the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Russia, Georgia and Ukraine) raises concerns about its vulnerability and the actions the GOAM is taking to address the problem. Experts agree that, while there is a low incidence of HIV/AIDS in Armenia at present, it is important to increase efforts at awareness and education to counter the problem before it grows out of hand. The USD 7.2 million grant to Armenia from the UN Global Aids Fund (25 percent funded by the USG) has bolstered the international donor community's efforts in this field. The USG is offering technical assistance as the GOAM combines the country's main HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection (STI) centers. HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns will only be successful among Armenia's mostly conservative society if the GOAM supports awareness campaigns that aggressively address this traditionally taboo issue. End Summary.

HIV/AIDS INCIDENCE STILL RELATIVELY LOW

3. (U) Many in the international community jump to the conclusion that Armenia, like its neighbor Georgia, is suffering from an HIV/AIDS epidemic that reaches far into the population. Although many experts believe that the GOAM continues to underestimate the problem (the GOAM reports there are only 252 registered cases of HIV/AIDS in the country), most experts agree that its scope is still relatively limited. The UN categorizes Armenia as a "basic" country in terms of HIV/AIDS incidence. This classification presumes that less than one percent of the total population carries the infection.

4. (U) The relatively low degree of HIV/AIDS in Armenia is a bit of an anomaly given the aggressive spread of the disease in neighboring Russia, Georgia and other CIS countries. Many point to Armenia's isolation during the early 1990s and early efforts aimed at awareness and prevention as reasons for the low level of infection. Some Diaspora advocacy groups have expressed concern to us, however, that the increasing flows of migrants between Russia and Armenia (mostly as seasonal laborers) may eventually lead to increased rates of HIV/AIDS infection in Armenia.

5. (U) Health experts believe that transmission of HIV/AIDS in Armenia takes place via heterosexual intercourse within high-risk populations. Like many countries in the region, Armenia's high-risk population consists mainly of intravenous drug users, commercial sex workers, military personnel, migrant workers, and prison populations.

GLOBAL FUND PROGRAMS AIM TO KEEP INCIDENCE LOW

6. (U) The UN Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS allocated USD 7.2 Million to Armenia in 2003. Experts report that this is a healthy sum for a country like Armenia and should fund a substantial program with national reach. These monies will be used for education, awareness and prevention programs. In addition, programs for voluntary testing and counseling centers will open throughout the country. These centers will work through a network of local NGOS. USAID is working

with the primary recipient, World Vision, to facilitate the program. According to information from the Ministry of Health, the GOAM will likely not apply to the Global Fund for AIDS-related programs in FY '05 but will instead apply for Tuberculosis (TB) funding.

GOAM MERGING AIDS, STI EFFORTS

17. (U) Beyond the specific question of HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) remain a serious problem in Armenia. Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Syphilis and other infections spread more rapidly among the Armenian population, but have received less attention from the global community. While GOAM resources to confront the spread of STIs remain limited, donor community programs (including USG assistance efforts) are working to curb this problem.

18. (U) The GOAM recently merged the Armenian National STI Center and the Armenian HIV/AIDS Center into one management unit. The former director of the STI center will now serve as the director of the new combined entity. This move has bureaucratic implications that could affect its ability to apply for and administer future funding. USAID is monitoring the situation carefully to facilitate a smooth merger that won't damage ongoing projects.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) As in many places, the HIV/AIDS issue hits sensitive nerves in Armenia's traditionally conservative society. While there is political will from the high-levels of the GOAM and within the healthcare community to address the issue, the real work of education, awareness and prevention lies with the everyday population. High expectations about the much-touted Armenecum treatment for HIV/AIDS (developed by Armenian scientists) appears to have waned in recent months, leaving Armenia to face the more mundane but dangerous reality of keeping the epidemic under control and treating those already infected by the disease. The GOAM will have to support donor community efforts to create buy-in among the population if prevention efforts are to succeed.

ORDWAY